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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**50 CFR Part 679**

**[Docket No. 140918791-4999-02]**

**RIN 0648-XE180**

**Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Reapportionment of the 2015 Gulf of Alaska Pacific Halibut Prohibited Species Catch Limits for the Trawl Deep-water and Shallow-water Fishery Categories**

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Temporary rule; reapportionment.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS is reapportioning the seasonal apportionments of the 2015 Pacific halibut prohibited species catch (PSC) limits for the trawl deep-water and shallow-water species fishery categories in the Gulf of Alaska. This action is necessary to account for the actual halibut PSC use by the trawl deep-water and shallow-water species fishery categories from May 15, 2015 through June 30, 2015. This action is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska.

**DATES:** Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), September 9, 2015 through 2400 hours, A.l.t., December 31, 2015.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Josh Keaton, 907-586-7228.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The final 2015 and 2016 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA (80 FR 10250, February 25, 2015) apportions the 2015 Pacific halibut PSC limit for trawl gear in the GOA to two trawl fishery categories: a deep-water species fishery and a shallow-water species fishery. The halibut PSC limit for these two trawl fishery categories is further apportioned by season, including four seasonal apportionments to the shallow-water species fishery and three seasonal apportionments to the deep-water species fishery. The two fishery categories also are apportioned a combined, fifth seasonal halibut PSC limit. Unused seasonal apportionments are added to the next season apportionment during a fishing year.

Regulations at § 679.21(d)(4)(iii)(D) require NMFS to combine management of the available trawl halibut PSC limits in the second season (April 1 through July 1) deep-water and shallow-water species fishery categories for use in either fishery from May 15 through June 30 of each year. Furthermore, NMFS is required to reapportion the halibut PSC limit between the deep-water and shallow-water species fisheries after June 30 to account for actual halibut PSC use by each fishery category during May 15 through June 30. As of September 1, 2015, NMFS has determined that the trawl deep-water and shallow-water fisheries used 75 metric tons (mt) and 1 mt of halibut PSC, respectively,

from May 15 through June 30. Accordingly, pursuant to § 679.21(d)(4)(iii)(D), the Regional Administrator is reapportioning the combined first and second seasonal apportionments (836 mt) of halibut PSC limit between the trawl deep-water and shallow-water fishery categories to account for the actual PSC use in each fishery. Therefore, Table 16 of the final 2015 and 2016 harvest specifications for groundfish in the GOA (80 FR 10250, February 25, 2015) is revised consistent with this adjustment.

Table 16. Final 2015 Apportionment of Pacific Halibut PSC Trawl Limits Between the Trawl Gear Deep-Water Species Fishery and the Shallow-Water Species Fishery Categories  
(Values are in metric tons)

Season	Shallow-water	Deep-water <sup>1</sup>	Total
January 20 - April 1	135	35	170
April 1 - July 1	291	375	666
Subtotal of combined first and second season limit (January 20 – July 1)	426	410	836
July 1 - September 1	352	176	528
September 1 - October 1	132	Any remainder	132
Subtotal January 20 - October 1	910	586	1,496
October 1 - December 31 <sup>2</sup>			264
Total			1,760

<sup>1</sup> Vessels participating in cooperatives in the Central GOA Rockfish Program will receive 191 mt of the third season (July 1 through September 1) deep-water species fishery halibut PSC apportionment.

<sup>2</sup> There is no apportionment between trawl shallow-water and deep-water species fishery categories during the fifth season (October 1 through December 31).

## Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and

contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would allow for harvests that exceed the originally specified apportionment of the halibut PSC limits to the deep-water and shallow-water fishery categories. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of September 3, 2015.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: September 8, 2015.

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Emily H. Menashes,  
Acting Director,  
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National Marine Fisheries Service.

